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Use of microblogging platform for digital communication in politics

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ABSTRACT

The growing influence of digital media has motivated many organizations, including political parties, to adopt it to promote their agendas, share political and professional viewpoints, and indulge in social interactions. Twitter is one of the microblogging platforms that stands out nowadays due to its important and influential role in the interactions related to politics and world crises, especially in spreading short transitory news across the world. This study examines the composition of the tweets of political organizations and their respective leaders, as well as the effect of these tweets on the people involved in the Indian 17th Parliament elections 2019. In addition, this work highlights the advantageous and disadvantageous strategies of the political parties, including the allegation of corruption against their opponents, are highlighted. The analysis demonstrates how political parties utilize Twitter to drive the public sentiment and use digital media to function.

1. Introduction

The social media domain has grown tremendously in the past decade (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Sindhani, Parameswar, Dhir, & Ongsakul, 2019; Arya, Sethi & Paul, 2019; Williams, Du, & Zhang, 2020). The number of digital channels used to relay relevant news and information to the public domain has increased (Anstead, 2015; Small, 2010). Twitter, which is one of these channels, provides a platform where brands and organizations can interact with their audiences without restriction (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Lahiri & Kumar, 2012; Singh, Chauhan, & Dhir, 2019). Social media platforms have been used by organizations to campaign against corruptive practices (George & Leidner, 2019; Hemsley, Jacobson, Gruzd, & Mai, 2018; Young, Selander, & Vaast, 2019). Political organizations increasingly use Twitter in their communication campaigns with different contemporary themes (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013; Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013b; Larsson & Moe, 2012). At present, political communication is deeply influenced by the innate capability of the Internet and social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, to channelize and shape public opinion (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García, & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Lee, Jimenez, & Bhandari, 2020; Paul & Singh, 2017). Compared with other channels, Twitter can form direct and close connection among audiences that helps change the traditional outlook of election campaigns. This change was recently observed in the 17th Parliament (Lok Sabha) elections in India in 2019. Political parties and leaders are now using Twitter to show their political affiliations, promote a positive image of their political parties, and express their rejection of the opposition's stance (Boersma, Buckley, & Ghauri, 2003; Gilal, Zhang, Paul, & Gilal, 2019; Kasmani, Sabran, & Ramle, 2014; Kruikemeier, 2014; Park, 2013). The two-way communication feature offered by Twitter is utilized by politicians and political parties to engage with the public regarding diverse issues, including corruption, growth, and development (Chadwick, Dennis, & Smith, 2016; McNair, 2017; Paul, Sankaranarayanan, & Mekoth, 2016). One of the common issues discussed by political organizations is corruption or corruptive practices (George & Leidner, 2019; Young et al., 2019). This study aims to investigate how political parties and politicians used Twitter in the 17th Lok Sabha elections by focusing on the themes of the tweets with specific emphasis on corruption. In addition, the political strategies adopted by these parties on Twitter are analyzed.

This study consists of four parts based on the research question being pursued. First, the frequency of tweets of the top political parties and leaders in India is examined. Previous studies highlighted the role and

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relevance of Twitter in the communication among businesses due to the increasing internet penetration in India (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Malhotra, Kubowicz, & See, 2012; Nguyen & Bang, 2019; Reilly & Hynan, 2014). However, only few studies have focused on the use of microblogging platforms in general and Twitter in specific by political parties in the context of emerging countries, such as India. Second, the linguistic features used by political parties and politicians to interact on Twitter are analyzed (Adi, Erickson, & Lilleker, 2014; Hemsley et al., 2018; Larsson & Moe, 2012). Such features are important in the context of India, which is a multicultural and multilingual nation. Third, the reception and influence of the tweets of the political parties and politicians are examined (Bakliwal et al., 2013; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016; Jungherr, 2013). Fourth, the sentiments expressed through the tweets are investigated to identify and discuss the prominent keywords used during the elections (Bakliwal et al., 2013; Boerman & Kruikemeier, 2016). The objective of the fourth part is to decipher how the political parties used the term "corruption" in their election campaign.

This work presents a unique and critical analysis of the tweets of political parties and politicians to demonstrate the use of digital communication in engaging with the public. Moreover, this study provides insights into the utility of the tweets to facilitate such an engagement.

2. Context: 17th Lok Sabha elections

The 17th Lok Sabha election was divided into seven phases from April 11, 2019 to May 19, 2019. The result of the elections was declared on May 23, 2019. Approximately 90 crore eligible votes were recorded, with a turnout of approximately 67%. Apart from being one of the elections with highest participation in the history of Indian democracy, the election also observed the highest participation of women in the history. Twitter reported that more than 396 million conversations on the hashtag "#LokSabhaElections2019" were recorded between January and May 2019 as part of the parliament elections.

A tweet of the then prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi (Fig. 1) with the hashtag "#VijayiBharat" (translated as "Bharat will Win") on May 23, 2019 has been referred to as India's "Golden Tweet of 2019" due to its high number of likes and retweets ("PM Modi's tweet on BJP's victory in Indian Parliament elections becomes 'Golden Tweet' of 2019," 2019). The diversity that Twitter offers along with the sharing of opinions not only through profiles, but also through the use of hashtags, retweets, and tweets, is extremely agile and unique (Arya et al., 2019; Gul et al., 2016; Hutchinson, 2016; Mueller, 2019). This diversity helped the political leaders show their interactive side and become close to their audience on a one-to-one basis compared with those introduced by other media (Hadjikhani, Lee, & Ghauri, 2008; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Jiménez, Salvaj, & Lee, 2018; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Paul, 2020). The capability of Twitter to garner bidirectional communication and audience interactivity on a direct and personal scale mainly contributes to its growth (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013a; Dabić et al., 2020; Jain, Celo, & Kumar, 2019; Paul & Bhakar, 2018). The versatile nature of Twitter is supported by its hashtag feature, which involves keywords or phrases that are prefixed by "#." Hashtags are crucial in analyzing the intensity of the trends driven by the tweets related to a particular event, as well as in investigating shared opinions with respect to a particular keyword.



Fig. 1. Golden Tweet of Modi (the Prime Minister of India).

The presence of political leaders and influencers in social media platforms, especially in Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, is rapidly increasing. As previously mentioned, Twitter tops the social media list in terms of audience interaction because it provides a highly engaging and serious platform for political and agenda-based discussions. The 280-character limit of Twitter encourages the users to be smart in using words to convey his/her views (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013a). The prominence of Twitter commenced when numerous business personalities, political leaders, political parties, firms, and celebrities joined this platform to share their opinions (Brandfog, 2014; Sindhani et al., 2019). Twitter-related studies have influenced many research fields, including finance, information technology, and healthcare (Bollen, Mao, & Zeng, 2011; Park, Rodgers, & Stemmle, 2013; Paul, Parthasarathy, & Gupta, 2017). Other areas affected by Twitter include journalism, politics, marketing strategy, and communication (Dodds, Harris, Kloumann, Bliss, & Danforth, 2011; Gayo-Avello, 2013; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Torres de Oliveira, Sahasranamam, Figueira, & Paul, 2019; Zappavigna, 2011). The communication style of a political party or a leader in social media plays an important role in projecting his/her public image and identity, and thus helps maximize public support (Choi, Sang, & Park, 2014; Gul et al., 2016; Lee, Jimenez, et al., 2020; Paul & Benito, 2018). Political parties and leaders can share their opinions on current issues and trends, provide explanations to controversies, and describe their own social views and agendas for the future (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Kruikemeier, Van Noort, Vliegenthart, & De Vreese, 2016; Kumar, Paul, & Unnithan, 2019). Keeping the audience engaged and centered on societal issues can build good people perception, credibility, and public trust. Social media has greatly affected political communication (Lorentzen, 2014; Sindhani et al., 2019). In the past, journalists were the only people who reported the wrongdoings that happened in the society. Now, social media grants the users identity and power to share their opinions and discuss any issue within seconds (Cho & Shin, 2014; Jiménez et al., 2018; Shwartz-Asher, Chun, & Adam, 2017; Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2009). The vast cultural and linguistic difference and the ethnicity- and religion-based diversity of India complicate the analysis of the factors influencing the election (Hao, Paul, Trott, Guo, & Wu, 2019; Kruikemeier et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2019). Using tweets to forecast or analyze election results has become increasingly prominent in the past decade (Larsson & Moe, 2014). Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, and Welpe (2010) conducted a study that predicted the result of the German federal elections in 2009. Nonetheless, the accuracy or precision of the prediction remains an issue due to the problems related to the consistency of the methods used to gather insights. Social media data are useful in detecting new communication trends or issues that might involve uncontrollable bad publicity (Bi, Zheng, & Liu, 2014; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2014; Lee, Choi, Ghauri, & Park, 2020; McLean & Griffiths, 2015). To support decision-making processes, companies utilize social media reports, create ex-post, and use predefined key performance indicators or a dashboard to perform analyses based on real-time social media data (Tsou et al., 2015). In this study, the social media content of India's top three political parties, namely, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (Congress), and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and the tweets of their political leaders (i.e., Narendra Modi, Sonia Gandhi, and Arvind Kejriwal, respectively) are examined. In addition, the tweets associated with some of the top trending hashtags during the last six months before the elections are analyzed. Table 1 shows the Twitter account stat statistics of the major political parties in India. The tweets cover different reactions and responses of the audience and the leaders toward societal problems and various political concerns, such as corruption, economy,

Table 1
Twitter statistics of the political parties.

Political party	Number of followers	Tweets	English tweets (%)
BJP (@BJP4India)	11,813,524	10,850	3057 (28%)
AAP (@AamAadmiParty)	4,914,453	1927	850 (44.11%)
Congress(@INCIndia)	5,669,376	3647	2244 (61%)

and law. After collecting the tweets, the text and keywords are studied, and relevant insights are derived using data analysis methodologies, such as topic modeling, sentiment analysis, language analysis, and tweet time analysis.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 3 discusses the methodology, timeline, sample size, data, and insight building tools. Section 4 presents the results and discussion. Section 5 lists the insights obtained from the analysis of the results. Lastly, Section 6 provides the conclusion along with limitation and future research directions.

3. Research design and methodology

Political leaders are regularly sharing information online by using social media channels to directly engage with the audience (Agarwal, Xie, Vovsha, Rambow, & Passonneau, 2011). Consequently, social media becomes an excellent platform for gathering information and an instant feedback mechanism for a new strategy, product, or service. However, deriving meaningful insights and results from the shared contents is challenging (Fernando et al., 2019; Stamatelatos, Gyftopoulos, Drosatos, & Efraimidis, 2020). Data analytics play an essential role in forming the design and marketing strategy for a business or political activity. Social media analytics can be divided into three categories: descriptive, content, and network analyses (Kušen & Strembeck, 2018; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Descriptive analysis is conducted to interpret the user's conduct and shared information (Chae, 2015). The metrics used to describe descriptive analytics include tweet count, follower size, retweet count, and mentions (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010). These categories also facilitate comprehensive analyses to gather an extensive view of the data added by other fields, such as friend count and tweet times (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013c).

3.1. Sentiment and emotion analysis

Sentiment analysis requires natural language processing (NLP) at the initial level to process the text. NLP is used to make sense of words and phrases combined in a sentence in a form that can be understood by machines to interpret meaningful information (Agarwal et al., 2011). Sentiment analysis can be used to classify texts at document (Pang & Lee, 2008), sentence (Hu & Liu, 1998), or phrase levels (Wilson et al., 2005). This analysis interprets the emotions implied in text patterns (Choy, Cheong, & Ma, 2011).

3.2. Language analysis

Opinions in Twitter are expressed in various languages and language greatly influences the kind of target audience. India has a wide range of linguistic diversification (Sylwester & Purver, 2015). The language used in a tweet may be different from the one used in the actual text. For instance, Hindi terms written in English (also called as "Hinglish") might have spelling mistakes and different vocabularies that will inherently decrease the accuracy of the systems and algorithms used to interpret the languages. NLP plays a crucial role in tweaking the algorithms to achieve a high accuracy.

3.3. Word clouds, hashtags, and mentions

Generating word clouds from the words included in a tweet is one of the most prominent and widely used methods for studying the words utilized by a Twitter user. This approach provides insights into the psychological activity of the user or the group of users. Word clouds are visualizations used to derive information about the most frequently used words in a text. Content analysis techniques help to understand the theme and context of the data. Several approaches, such as analysis of hashtags, understanding mentions, and word clouds, help derive the gist of the semantics associated with the text (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013b). For example, hashtags can be used to capture the effect of certain news or opinions by extracting the tweets about a particular keyword.

3.4. Polarity analysis

Polarity refers to how a tweet creates polarization among the viewers (Grover, Kar, Dwivedi, & Janssen, 2019). The polarity of a tweet can be classified as positive or negative depending on the interpretation of the people. Non-polar tweets convey neutral emotions. If a tweet induces a positive effect on the audience, the corresponding polarity is positive (Hitt, Ahlstrom, Dacin, Levitas, & Svobodina, 2004). Conversely, a tweet that generates negative emotions has a negative polarity. Polarity plays a big role in politics, especially in establishing the connection between the user and the audience, which has an extremely high social volatility.

The Twitter data analyzed in this study comprise relevant tweets from the top political parties and their leaders and keywords associated with the 17th Lok Sabha elections. Roughly six months' worth of Twitter data are collected from December 1, 2018 to June 1, 2019. The data include the tweets from the start of the election campaigns to the declaration of the result. A total of 589,871 tweets are extracted using Twitter API. Python and R language are used as supporting coding languages for data analysis. The data visualization is performed using Tableau Desktop. Fig. 2 depicts the process flow. The analysis is divided into the following four sections.

(1) Tweets about corruption
(2) Tweets posted by the three major political parties (BJP, AAP, and Congress)
(3) Tweets posted by political leaders of the top parties (Modi, Kejriwal, and Gandhi)
(4) Tweets on on the most prominent keywords used in the election

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Tweets about corruption

In 2014, BJP won against the Congress-led government. The latter was afflicted with corruption scandals, and people resonated with Modi's slogan "Na khaunga, na khane doonga" (translated as "Neither I will eat, nor I will allow anyone to eat"). Corruption is a sensitive issue during Indian elections. This issue is used by the candidates or political parties to garner support or create anti-incumbency campaigns against the ruling government. T Congress presented some major issues and tried to malign BJP's image by raising controversies, such as the Rafale jet deal. This strategy received strong retaliation from Modi, who raised the issue of the Bofors gun scam and called former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as "Corrupt Number 1". Modi's "Main Bhi Chowkidar" campaign against corruption attracted great attention on Twitter. On March 16, 2019, Modi asked the Indians to use the hashtag "#MainBhiChowkidar" (translated as "I, too, am a watchman"). This hashtag became a worldwide trending slang, and the followers changed their Twitter handles and attached the prefix "Chowkidar" to their names. The trend also became one of Modi's top trending campaigns, garnering over 56,000 retweets. In this study, the tweets that revolve around the keywords "Main Bhi Chowkidar" and "Chowkidar Chor Hai" (translated as "the

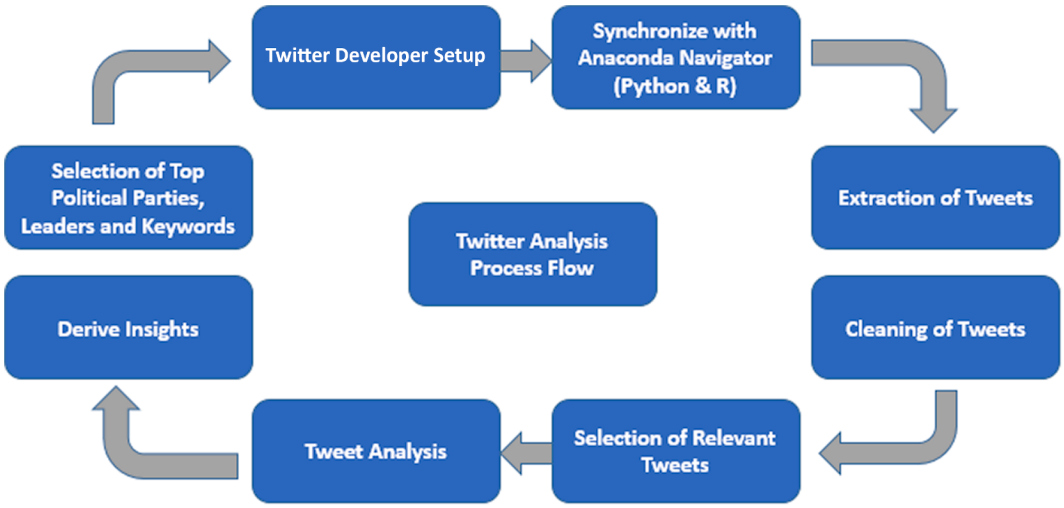


Fig. 2. Process flow.

watchman is a robber") are considered for the analysis. A total of 15,000 sample tweets for each keyword are collected from Twitter.

4.2. *"Main Bhi Chowkidar" campaign*

The most frequently used words related to the keyword "Main Bhi Chowkidar" include "India," "BJP," "namoagain," "amitshah," and "modi." BJP is mentioned in approximately 25% of the tweets, whereas Congress is mentioned in just 2%. Prime Minister Modi is referred to in 16% of the tweets. The Main Bhi Chowkidar campaign, which is one of the most crucial campaigns in BJP's election victory, resonates with the party's image of honesty and sincerity. Topic modeling shows that numerous discussions revolve around the terms "Modi" and "BJP." The hashtag "#AbKiBarModiSarkar" (translated as "this time Modi government") is used 5008 times, and "#Modiharitohmumkinhai" (translated as "It is impossible for Modi to lose") has 3729 calls. The Twitter handles of Modi and BJP are the most mentioned accounts, followed by those of Amit Shah and Gandhi.

4.3. *"Chowkidar Chor Hai" campaign*

The most frequently mentioned words related to the keyword "Chowkidar Chor Hai" are "BJP," "modi," "rafale," and "chowkidar." BJP and Modi are referred to in nearly 48% of the tweets. This campaign is one of Congress' strategies to question the clean image of Modi, however, the utility of this campaign was affected negative as the phrase "Main Bhi Chowkidar" became a household phrase. Prominent tweets include the hashtags "#bjp_bhagao_desh_bachao" (translated as "Remove BJP and save the country") and "#RafaleScam," that were direct attack towards BJP. Topic modeling shows that a large portion of the discussions is related to "chowkidar" and corruption. The most mentioned Twitter handles are those of Modi and Gandhi, followed by those of Congress and BJP. The sentiment analysis reveals that "Chowkidar Chor Hai" tweets convey nearly five times more negativity compared with "Main bhi Chowkidar" tweets. Approximately 40% of the tweets contain root words that mention corruption. Tables 2–4 show the results of the unigram, bigram, and trigram analyses on the corruption theme, respectively. Tables 5 and 6 respectively summarize the hashtags and mentions related to corruption, and Fig. 3 illustrates the word cloud analysis of the related keywords.

Table 2
Unigram analysis of the corruption theme.

Phrases	Keywords			
	Main Bhi Chowkidar		Chowkidar Chor Hai	
Unigrams	India	2570	BJP	3567
	BJP	2568	Modi	2692
	Modi	1555	Rafale	1987
	BJP	1065	Chowkidar ("watchman")	1861
	Namoagain	974	Chor ("thief")	1207

Table 3
Bigram analysis of the corruption theme.

Phrases	Keywords			
	Main Bhi Chowkidar		Chowkidar Chor Hai	
Bigrams	New India	1029	BJP India	542
	BJP India	529	Chor hai ("He/she is a thief"	294
	Pm modi	492	Rahul Gandhi	228
	India strong	407	Chowkidar chor ("watchman is the thief")	226
	Strong secure	402	Supreme court	211

Table 4
Trigram analysis of the corruption theme.

Phrases	Keywords			
	Main Bhi Chowkidar		Chowkidar Chor Hai	
Trigrams	New India strong	402	BJP modi fail	117
	India strong secure	401	Modi fails BJP	86
	Proud join movement	373	Bjpfails bjp modilies	74
	Best defeat dirt	366	Phulwama apnibaat aeroindia	55
	Citizen love India	352	Does not change	52

4.4. *Tweets of the political parties*

A total of 16,425 tweets from the individual accounts of BJP, Congress, and AAP were collected for the analysis. BJP had the highest number of followers, which is more than the combined follower counts of AAP and Congress. Fig. 4 shows the average favorite count timeline of the political parties.

The timelines of the three parties show that BJP lead in terms of audience engagement due to its high number of retweets and likes per post. Fig. 5 depicts the average retweet timeline of the three political parties. Immense activity is observed on the Twitter pages of the political parties prior to the parliament elections, terrorist attack at Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir, and airstrikes at Balakot. Given that the above mentioned events were testing times for the ruling BJP government, Congress garnered more engagement during these situations.

Table 5
Hashtags about corruption.

Phrases	Keywords			
	Main Bhi Chowkidar		Chowkidar Chor Hai	
Hashtags	#phirekbaarmodisarkar ("Modi government once more")	1976	#bjp_bhagao_desh_bachao ("Remove BJP and save the country")	2076
	#namoagain	1880	#rafalescam	1845
	#modihaitomumkinhai ("It is possible with Modi")	1500	#rafaledeal	1777
	#loksabhaelections2019	1383	#modimadedisaster	1497
	#aayegatomodihi ("Modi will surely come to power")	1370	#gobackmodi	1433

Table 6
Mentions of corruption.

Phrases	Keywords			
	Main Bhi Chowkidar		Chowkidar Chor Hai	
Mentions	@narendramodi	1704	@rahulgandhi	2177
	@bjp4india	1632	@narendramodi	2109
	@amitshah	1431	@incindia	1667
	@rahulgandhi	1227	@bjp4india	1435
	@incindia	1184	@priyankagandhi	1140

The languages used by the three parties (Fig. 6) suggest the diversity of BJP in terms of using English, Gujarati, Hindi, and Marathi. Most tweets of all parties are in English and Hindi. Congress leads the English count with approximately 61% of the tweets, whereas BJP mainly uses Hindi terms in 75% of its tweets. AAP tweets using both languages in a relatively balanced manner. The results of the tweet frequency analysis (Fig. 7) suggest that BJP leads in terms of tweeting and engaging with the audience. The word cloud analysis outcomes of all parties (Fig. 8) have one thing in common: reference to PM Modi. All parties mention Modi to either convey positive or negative impressions. The word cloud analysis results of BJP indicate consistent reference to Modi and Shah. Other relevant keywords include "live meeting," "Amit Shah," and "Congress." BJP encourages the audience to view their live meetings. Shah is the second most referred person after Modi. The world cloud analysis results of AAP show that the party was mainly focused on Delhi and The Delhi Assembly (state) elections were not far from the 17th Lok Sabha elections. Other prominent keywords include "BJP," "national," and "mssisodia." Congress uses a set of words consisting of the terms "Congress," "President," "Modi," and "India."

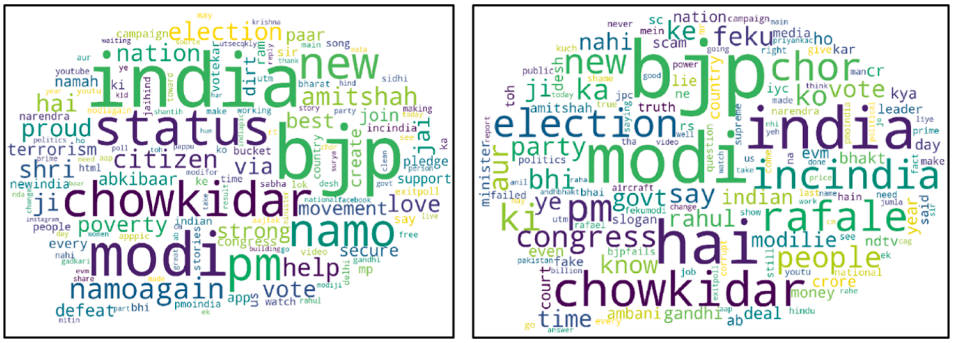
Word clouds provide information on how a set of words is used in the tweets and which agendas are prominent. The n-gram analysis for BJP shows the party's actions to project Modi as a representative of the public and Amit Shah as the National President of BJP. On the other hand, for Congress the n-gram analysis depicts that the party's tweets were directed towards PM Modi or BJP (Tables 7, 8, and 9). AAP highlighted the actions of the party conveners Kejriwal and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia to deliver good governance in Delhi. The hashtag analysis for BJP indicated that the party frequently uses the hashtags "#forthefirsttime," "#deshmodikesaath" (translated as "country is with Modi"), "#modihiaayega" (translated as "Modi will come"), "#modi4newindia," and "#liarrahul" (Table 10). AAP's usage of hashtags is less prominent compared with that of BJP. However, because the former is consistently fighting for the full statehood of Delhi, the hashtags "#fullstatehood4delhi," "#pulwama," and "#loksabhaelections2019" are frequently mentioned in its tweets. Pulwama is also mentioned as the terrorist attack at Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir occurred prior to the elections. Congress used the hashtags "#abhoganyay" (translated as "Justice will Happen"), "#inconversationwith," "#rafalescam," and "#chowkidarchorhai" to reflect their focus on achieving true justice, which was their motto in the 17th Lok Sabha elections. Furthermore, the Rafale scam was consistently mentioned along with "#chowkidarchorhai" (Translated as "watchman in the Thief"), which refers to PM Modi as "chowkidar." The relevant issue became controversial after Gandhi was pulled up by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. The top mentions for BJP are Modi and Shah, followed by Prasad, Jaitley, and Patra. AAP leaders, Kejriwal and Sisodia, are also prominently mentioned. Congress mentions Gandhi in almost every seventh tweet. Table 11 provides the list of mentions by political parties. The result of the polarity analysis (Fig. 9) is in favor of BJP, which garners a 41% positivity rate, followed by Congress (39%) and then AAP (34%). Fig. 10 presents the emotion analysis of tweets.

5. Insights from the analysis

Newman and Sheth (1985) developed a model of voter's choice, which states that various factors (e.g., current issues and policies, social imagery, emotions, candidate image, current events, personal events, and epistemic issues) affect the mindset of the voters (Newman & Sheth, 1985). Twitter influences one or more of these factors. The insights gathered from the analysis are summarized as follows.

RQ1: What was the tweet frequency of the top political parties and leaders?

BJP, Modi, and the political leaders of the ruling government have high tweet frequencies, whereas Congress, AAP, Gandhi, Kejriwal, and the other political leaders from the opposition have relatively low tweet frequencies.



i) Main Bhi Chowkidar ii) Chowkidar Chor Hai

Fig. 3. Word cloud analysis of the keywords about corruption.

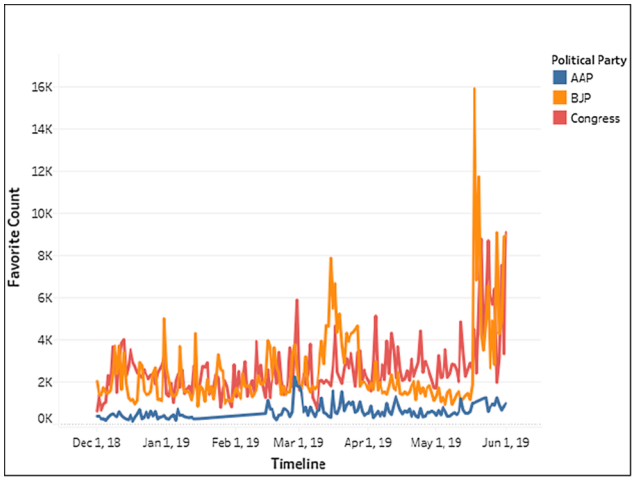


Fig. 4. Average favorite count timeline of the political parties.

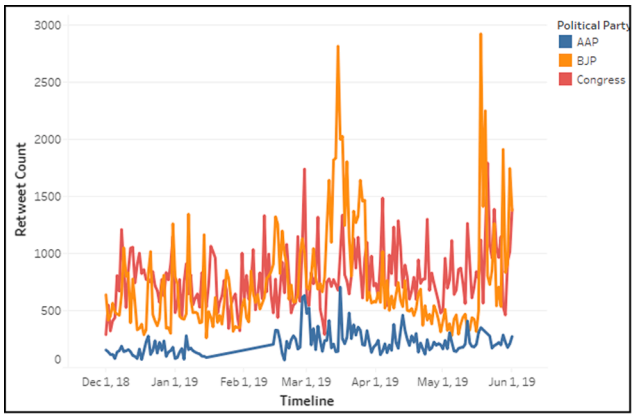


Fig. 5. Average retweet timeline of the political parties.

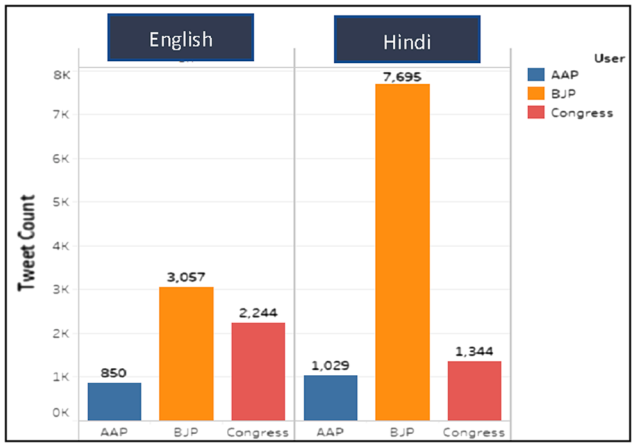


Fig. 6. Linguistic preference of the political parties.

RQ2: What were the languages used by the parties and leaders to interact on Twitter?

BJP is the most diverse party in terms of language. The tweets of this party are expressed in English, Gujarati, Hindi, and Marathi. Most of the tweets of the three parties are in English and Hindi. Congress leads the English tweet count (approximately 61% of all tweets), whereas BJP utilizes Hindi expressions on most occasions (nearly 75% of all tweets). AAP uses an equal amount of English and Hindi tweets, and no major skew toward a particular language is observed. The results of language analysis on the leaders of the three political parties show that Modi mainly uses English as a medium. He tweets in English 84% of the time, followed by Gandhi (61%) and Kejriwal (44%).

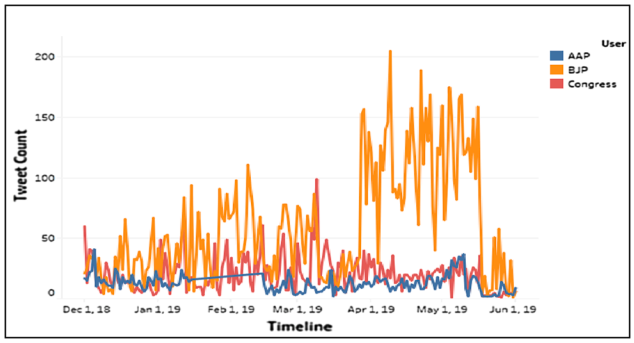


Fig. 7. Tweet frequency of the political parties.

RQ3: What was the difference in the tweet reception and influence of the political parties and leaders?

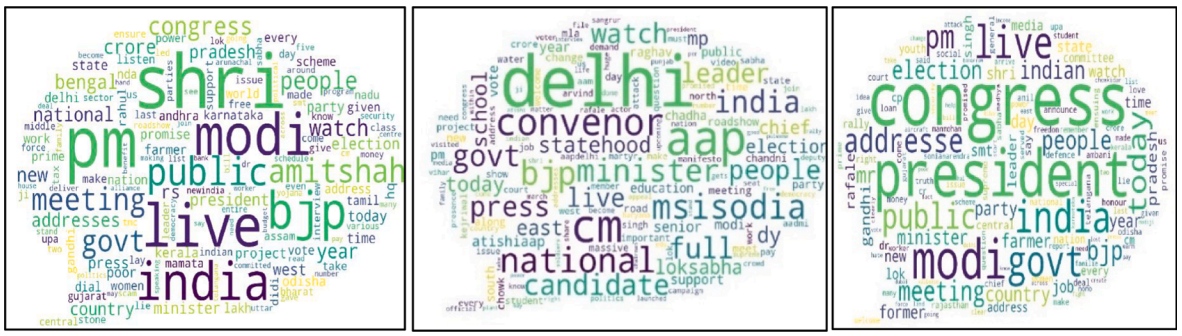
The timelines of the three parties show that BJP leads in terms of engagement most of the time due to its high number of average retweets and likes per post. Major upheavals are observed during the state elections prior to the 17th Lok Sabha elections, Pulwama terrorist attack, Balakot airstrikes, and return of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman. Considering that the abovementioned events were difficult and controversial times for the ruling government, Congress garnered more engagement during these periods. The timelines of the three leaders showed that Gandhi lead in terms of audience engagement most of the time.

RQ4: What kind of sentiments were derived from the prominent keywords during the elections?

The results of BJP's word cloud analysis demonstrate consistent reference to Modi and Shah and include the terms "live meeting," "Amit Shah," and "Congress". The word cloud analysis for AAP reflects the party's major concentration on Delhi. The other prominent keywords include "BJP," "national," and "mssisodia." Congress uses a set of words, such as "Congress," "President," "Modi," and "India." Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and Dr. Manmohan Singh are frequently mentioned in the tweets. AAP emphasizes the actions of Kejriwal and Sisodia to improve the governance in Delhi. Moreover, the BJP government is questioned about its governance by both Congress and AAP.

6. Conclusion

Recent studies on politics and national agendas focus on the current or real state of politics because most of the efforts are directed toward complementing the media and mobilizing the existing supports to create a domino effect. However, the implications of offline politics, which also affects the digital sphere, remain disregarded. In addition, the studies that focus on such implications are relatively rare. The election campaign of BJP started earlier than that of Congress. Inferring that the digital media is solely responsible for the historic victory of BJP is inaccurate, but the digital platform did play a pivotal role in the party's election campaign. The Twitter trend revolves around corruption. The 17th Lok Sabha elections (also referred as 2019 Indian general election) was preceded by multiple accusations of the Congress about the corrupt practices of BJP and Modi. Corruption is a famous theme in election campaigns around the world (Pereira, Melo, & Figueiredo, 2008; Peters & Welch, 1980). The 17th Lok Sabha election is associated with nearly 15,000 corruption-related tweets, thereby implying the important role of corruption in differentiating politicians and political parties. The digitalization of communication media facilitates the quick and easy transmission of thoughts and allows the users to communicate with the



(i) BJP (ii) AAP (iii) Congress

Fig. 8. Word cloud analysis of the tweets of the political parties.

Table 7
Unigram analysis of the political parties.

Phrases	Party accounts					
	BJP (occurrences)		AAP (occurrences)		Congress (occurrences)	
Unigrams	Shri	835	Delhi	502	Congress	733
	Pm	728	Aap	190	President	543
	Modi	473	Convenor	171	Modi	368
	India	467	National	109	India	232
	Bjp	389	Mssisodia	91	Live	220
	public	375	Bjp	88	Govt	220
	amitshah	324	India	83	Public	180
	meeting	319	Minister	74	Addresses	173
	govt	268	India	70	Pm	162
	congress	258	Govt	68	BJP	158

Table 8
Bigram analysis of the political parties.

Phrases	Party accounts					
	BJP (occurrences)		AAP (occurrences)		Congress (occurrences)	
Bigrams	shri amitshah	314	delhi cm	96	congress president	501
	pm shri	297	national convenor	71	live congress	137
	public meeting	259	convenor delhi	56	president addresses	136
	pm modi	198	aap national	49	public meeting	112
	live pm	165	dy cm	48	addresses public	107
	addresses public	129	cm msisodia	44	mr modi	82
	live shri	127	full statehood	41	modi govt	76
	bjp national	101	east delhi	36	congress party	69
	west bengal	101	chief minister	35	pm modi	69
	national president	97	delhi dy	33	lok sabha	41

audience regarding different issues. The Chowkidar Chor Hai and Main Bhi Chowkidar campaigns exhibited a notable effect on the public. Similarly, tweets about the corruption involved in the Rafale aircraft deal, which occurred prior to the election, garnered great interest. When the corruption in the aircraft deal was disproved, the tweets established relevance, and their effect flipped back to negatively affect the initiators of the tweet. Corruption is a completely distinguishable theme in tweets compared with economy, growth, and development, which have other underlying themes. Modi's digital team maintained a stream of regular tweets to connect with the public. These tweets were spread evenly by his ardent followers and party members. The digital team not only

Table 9
Trigram analysis of the political parties.

Phrases	Party accounts					
	BJP (occurrences)		AAP (occurrences)		Congress (occurrences)	
Trigrams	addresses public meeting	124	national convenor delhi	54	live congress president	137
	live shri amitshah	98	convenor delhi cm	53	congress president addresses	136
	bjp national president	96	aap national convenor	45	addresses public meeting	97
	national president shri	95	dy cm msisodia	40	president addresses public	95
	president shri amitshah	94	delhi dy cm	33	central election committee	40
	live pm shri	80	delhi chief minister	21	congress central election	40
	pm modi addresses	70	full statehood delhi	16	election committee announces	39
	shri amitshah public	68	east delhi candidate	15	ensuing elections lok	34
	modi addresses public	67	aap delhi convenor	11	dr manmohan singh	33
	pm shri public	59	aap press live	10	smt sonia gandhi	33

focused on the frequency and required amplification, but also delivered humanly connection through great narratives, catchy hashtags (e.g., #AbKiBarModiSarkar and #Namo), and personalized messages to the followers to ensure the success of Modi's social media strategy.

This study reviews the Twitter-based communication strategies used by political organizations and leaders during the 17th Lok Sabha elections. The results show the diverse themes of the tweets, as well as the prominence of the corruption theme. Moreover, the findings reveal the effectiveness of Twitter in political communication and demonstrates the shift from traditional communication to digital communication. This study is a pioneer research on the review of the digital communication undertaken by political parties and politicians over Twitter during the 17th Lok Sabha elections.

The results further suggest that political parties which plan to utilize Twitter as a mode of communication must conceptualize thematic communication to engage with the public. The Indian context resembles those of other emerging markets, which are characterized by institutional voids, bureaucratic system, and limited transparency. This study explains how corruption, as a theme of communication, influences the

Table 10
Hashtag analysis of the political parties.

Phrases	Party accounts					
	BJP (occurrences)		AAP (occurrences)		Congress (occurrences)	
Hashtags	#forthefirsttime	31	#fullstatehood4delhi	6	#abhoganyay	26
	#deshmodikesaath	16	#pulwama	5	#inconversationwith	13
	#modihiaayega	14	#loksabhaelections2019	5	#rafalescam	11
	#modi4newindia	14	#aap	5	#chowkidarchorhai	7
	#liarrahul	13	#ripbravehearts	4	#jansankalprally	6
	#apnamodiaayega	13	#delhigovtschoolsshine	3	#bjpjumlamanifesto	6
	#5yearchallenge.	13	#vote4aap	3	#parivartanbusyatra	5
	#isbaarnamophirse	12	#rafaledeal	3	#rahulforyoungindia	5
	#modiswearingin	11	#delhigovtschool	3	#nammarahulgandhi	5
	#everyvoteformodi	11	#savedemocracy	3	#nyayforkarnataka	4

Table 11
Twitter mentions of the political parties.

Phrases	Party accounts					
	BJP (occurrences)		AAP (occurrences)		Congress (occurrences)	
Mentions	@narendramodi	408	@arvindkejriwal	171	@rahulgandhi	517
	@amitshah	307	@msisodia	68	@narendramodi	30
	@rsprasad	19	@aapkagopalrai	33	@priyankagandhi	20
	@arunjaitley	17	@sanjayazadsln	26	@nsitharaman	15
	@sambitswaraj	17	@atishiaap	24	@arunjaitley	11

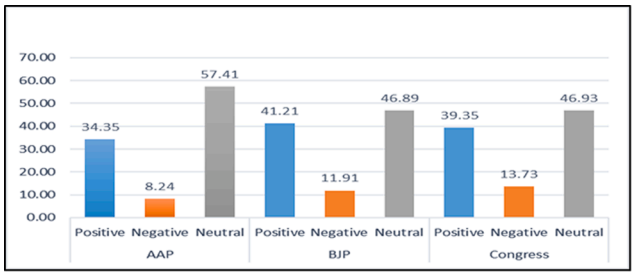


Fig. 9. Polarity analysis of the political parties.

election campaign in one of the largest democracies in the world. In addition, this study provides an overview of the Twitter usage of the political parties, which can be used by businesses as reference in planning their communication strategies. This work also emphasizes the need for an effective strategy formulation and implementation for election campaigns. These campaigns should be consistent with the activities conducted by political parties. This aspect is extendable and generalizable across the world as it is a basic tenet that must be followed by political parties and business organizations.

6.1. *Limitations and directions for future research*

This study has few inherent limitations. First, this work only considers the communication strategy adopted by the political parties in India to utilize Twitter six months prior to the 17th Lok Sabha elections. As a result, the effect of the actions undertaken by the political parties prior to the six month period are excluded. These actions might have played important role in the election campaign. Second, as the analysis is limited to Indian context, the generalizability of the results is also limited. Nonetheless, as one of the few works that analyze the tweets of political parties with emphasis on their themes, this study can still serve as a useful reference for future research. Lastly, this study focuses on the three prominent political parties in the country that utilized Twitter for communication. Future research should consider other political parties in the country as part of their analysis.

Future works should also investigate how political organizations use other social media channels, such as Facebook and YouTube, to



Fig. 10. Emotion analysis of the political parties.

communicate with the people. Researchers can explore and compare the different social media channels used by various political organizations in different countries to establish their brands. In addition, the context can be extended to emerging countries. Furthermore, relevant theories, including prospect and masstige theory, and technology acceptance models can be utilized to analyze the communication strategy.

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